

The Importance of Being “Bold and Audacious” in Delivering Education Today



PROBLEMATIZE: Learning Reimagined

The School District of University City (SDUC) continues to receive strong support from its school board and community for its “bold and audacious” efforts to ensure student success through effective and enduring programs. A review of the 2024 Annual Performance Report (APR) scores across all subject areas and schools highlights the impact of targeted interventions, specialized curricular supports and an emphasis on professional development for teachers. While the results also identify areas for improvement, overall, the District remains steady in its performance.



Superintendent Sharonica L. Hardin-Bartley, Ph.D., PHR, addresses community at the annual State of the District.

The recent State of the District address in February provided an opportunity to engage directly with the community and offer insights into the report’s findings. The full APR report, available online at ucityschools.org/APR, indicates positive trends, with the District maintaining a steady ranking at 75.2 percent. This places University City in the middle of neighboring districts and those of similar size, serving as a consistent benchmark for performance comparison.

One of the most significant changes noted in the report is enrollment growth, with nearly 3,000 students now districtwide. At a time when families have numerous educational choices, the increase in enrollment reflects

the District’s appeal. This growth includes a rise in multilingual learners, whose presence enriches the educational environment and strengthens the District’s diverse culture. University City High School (UCHS) enrollment has reached its highest level in 20 years.

Additionally, the District’s four-year graduation rate has shown a notable increase of 7.8 percentage points, reaching 91.6 percent in 2024—an indicator that University City is trending in the right direction. Scores in core subject areas—English Language Arts, math, science, and social studies—highlight areas where new curricular implementation is yielding positive results. Individual student performance data suggests growth, particularly in social studies, where recent curriculum changes have contributed to upward trends. As the District continues to integrate its new math curriculum, further improvements in that subject area are anticipated. Currently, math remains an area of focus for improvement.

UCHS saw a slight decline in advanced placement and assessment performance. The District is actively analyzing these results. Additionally, while UCHS attendance rates are improving, further gains are needed.

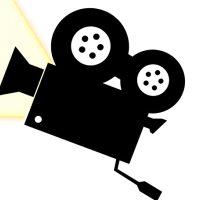
The District’s three guiding pillars—personalize, humanize, and problematize—were created seven years ago in partnership by The School



Students, the heart of SDUC, showed up in full force, celebrating the District’s commitment to their success and bright futures.

District of University City Board of Education and community and have proven to be a strong foundation for improving the overall educational experience. Strategic Priority One, which focuses on creating a “modern, rigorous, and relevant learning experience,” remains central to the District’s mission. This priority drives efforts to strengthen academic programs and prepare students for careers that may not yet exist, equipping them to be change agents in an evolving world.

The APR provides just a snapshot of the District’s progress and ongoing initiatives to build resources across all grade levels. For more detailed information about the State of the District, please scan the QR code or visit ucityschools.org/SODVideo25.



Lead Nurse Pat Wilson Named MASN’S School Nurse Administrator of the Year

The District proudly celebrates Lead Nurse Pat Wilson, who has been named the 2025 Missouri Association of School Nurses’ (MASN)



School Nurse Administrator of the Year. This honor highlights her leadership, dedication, and commitment to student and staff health. She is now a contender for national award recognition.

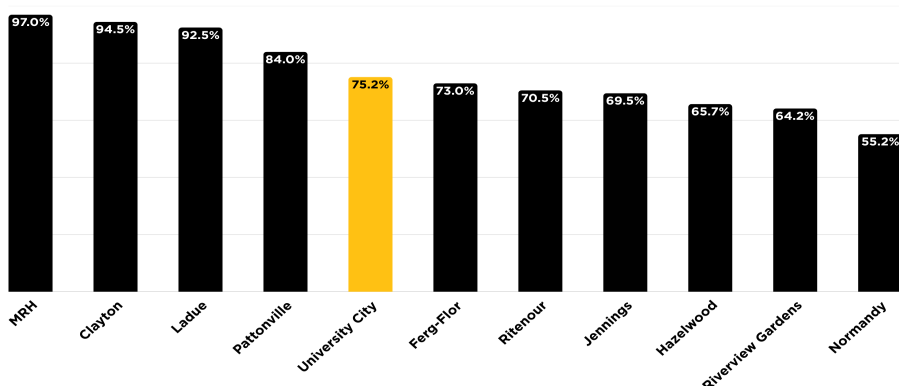
With more than 28 years in SDUC, Wilson has been a tireless advocate for student health. Her leadership during COVID-19 was crucial, working with the St. Louis County Health Department and Washington University in St. Louis’ School of Medicine to keep the community safe.

Executive Director of Student Services Gary Spiller, who has worked with Wilson for nearly a decade, praised her ability to bridge healthcare and education. “She is a leader and team player, always willing to go above and beyond,” he said.

As she earns this recognition, Wilson is also preparing for retirement. Grateful for her colleagues, she reflected, “I couldn’t do what I do without our dedicated team of school nurses. University City is in great hands.”

Though she will be missed, her legacy of care and compassion will continue to shape University City culture for years to come.

DISTRICT APR COMPARISON (2024)



SDUC maintains a 75.2% ranking in the latest APR report, positioning it among neighboring and similar-sized districts. The full report, presented in the 2025 State of the District address, is available at ucityschools.org/APR.

Message From Our Superintendent of Schools



Sharonica L. Hardin-Bartley
Superintendent

Greetings University City Students, Families and Staff,
On March 1, we launched “CommUNITY Chat,” a new engagement series designed to foster open, meaningful discussions with students, families, staff and community members. Topics ranged from the impact of proposed education legislation to updates on Prop U projects. High school students who stayed after the Summer Showcase—a counselor-led event highlighting summer opportunities—were especially excited to hear about the new multipurpose field coming soon to UCHS.

This informal setting encourages genuine conversations on issues that matter most. While I hope to see participation grow, I was pleased with the engagement and dialogue in our first sessions. Given recent political changes affecting education, funding and equity, our community has many concerns.

The audience, including leaders of our parent organizations and student council, wanted to know how proposed legislation could impact our schools. I was incredibly proud of our students—many had just performed in a stage production showcasing their talent, yet here they were, engaged in civic discussions, learning about responsibility and standing up for their beliefs.

One of the most pressing concerns raised was the impact of policy changes on public education. Our district opposes any initiative that diverts funds from public schools to private institutions. The majority of our funding comes from local sources, including Prop U, and with minimal state or federal support, such policy shifts could have serious consequences.

We also discussed proposed cuts to the free and reduced lunch program, which would be a devastating blow to

students who rely on school meals. At the same time, recent executive orders have led some companies and universities to scale back diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives. While these orders are not laws until passed by lawmakers, they set a tone that influences decision-making at all levels.

As a direct result of our CommUNITY Chat discussions, we have expanded our legislative updates page at ucityschools.org/legislation, outlining measures under consideration—more than half of which could significantly impact education. I urge everyone to stay informed, and above all, I encourage our students to be resilient, engaged and to use their voices. Their education at University City has taught them the value of personal responsibility and community, and these lessons have never been more important than they are now.

I invite you to the next CommUNITY Chat on Thursday, April 24, 2025, at University City High School, in partnership with Special School District. The focus will be students with IEPs, though all

topics are welcome. I want to be accessible, listen and provide information. Register at ucityschools.org/commchat.

In closing, let me reflect on Flynn Park’s upcoming 100th Anniversary. I’m reminded of the words of its first principal, Mrs. Helen D. Rossi, “We are not one city, or one state, or one nation. We are ONE WORLD.” Her words ring as true today as they did then. Let’s continue to listen, engage and work together to strengthen our community and our schools.

In Service of Our Children,

Sharonica L. Hardin-Bartley, Ph.D., PHR
Superintendent of Schools

CommUNITY Chat

With Superintendent Sharonica L. Hardin-Bartley

U. City families, please join us for our next CommUNITY Chat held in collaboration with Special School District (SSD)! This session will focus on supporting our students with IEPs.

Families will have the opportunity to learn more about the services SSD provides and engage in meaningful discussions about how we can work together to best support your child’s success.

THURSDAY, APRIL 24 | 6-7 PM
UCHS Auditorium, 7401 Balson Ave.

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WWW.UCITYSCHOOLS.ORG

SCAN THE QR CODE OR VISIT UCITYSCHOOLS.ORG/COMMCHAT TO REGISTER!

Board of Education Spotlight



Monica A. Stewart, Ed.D.
Board of Education President

Greetings from the Board of Education!

It is my privilege to address you with a personal perspective as an educator, as president of the Board of Education and as a proud community member.

I am grateful to University City’s diverse and uniquely progressive community for taking pride in supporting its schools as well as the heralded institutions of higher learning at its gates. Thanks also to our incredibly supportive partners, volunteers and community, who make it possible for us to create new projects, programs and opportunities for our students.

One great example is our Agriculture and Sustainability program, featured in this issue of PRIDE. It is a great example of how we are adding to our curricula in order to create new career paths and experiences for students in kindergarten through 12th grade. We have aligned our curriculum across grade levels and structured the courses to involve all core disciplines. To learn more, please ask at school about what this program could offer your student.

There are many great things happening in our district and many ways in which our community can be engaged,

educated and entertained. Please know our parents and community are always welcome in our schools. We welcome your partnership, thoughts, ideas and suggestions as they help inform decision-making.

Finally, I want to acknowledge the work of our teachers and staff who support our students academically, socio-emotionally and help ensure a mutualized feeling of well-being and joy every day.

As highlighted in the Superintendent’s State of the District address (ucityschools.org/SODVideo25), we have much to celebrate, but there is more work to be done. Despite proposed and planned changes in law that impact education, The School District of University City remains committed to ensuring that each and every student has access to the resources needed to succeed not only in the classroom, but also in life.

Sincerely,

Monica A. Stewart, Ed.D.
Board of Education President

The personal opinions expressed in the letter above may not reflect those of the entire University City Board of Education.

University City Board of Education Candidate Statements

Two residents have filed for candidacy in the April 8, 2025, election for two, three-year seats on the University City Board of Education.

Laverne Ford-Williams*

I am honored to enter my 10th year as a University City School District Board Director.

Before retiring as an educator after 37 years of dedicated service in the district, I set a personal goal: to

continue my passion for serving the children and community of University City by joining the Board of Education.

This journey has given me the privilege of collaborating with extraordinary individuals who have supported, mentored and inspired me along the way. One such individual is Joy Lieberman. Throughout my career, I attended numerous Board meetings and deeply admired Joy, a longtime Board member whose leadership and unwavering dedication to our students left a lasting impact.

For years, she inspired me to pursue a position on the Board after retirement, and her tireless advocacy for all children in University City resonated with me. Joy was steadfast in ensuring that every student had access to the highest quality education, and her passion was evident in every meeting during her remarkable 24-year tenure.

I share Joy’s commitment to providing our students with the support, resources, and opportunities they need to achieve lifelong success. I am both humbled and grateful to continue in her footsteps, striving to uphold the values and vision that she so passionately championed.

Your ongoing support—both for me as an educator and as a Board member—means the world to me. As I continue this work, my commitment remains unwavering: to ensure that every child in University City receives an exceptional education and the foundation for a bright future.



Guerin Pichon

After spending 20 years in the healthcare auditing space, I transitioned into a financial planning practice with Northwestern Mutual. Using my love of detail, working with people and the ability to keep the “big picture” in sight, I have been able to grow a practice that grants a generous amount of time and flexibility.

Since entering the district 4 years ago, I have served as Co-Secretary of One UCity, a soccer coach, baseball coach, Lego League coach, a Girls on the Run coach and Co-President of the Jackson Park Community Collaborative for the 2024-2025 school year. My children have had a wonderful experience growing up in this district, they feel seen and heard, protected and praised, supported and loved. I believe in the district and the many benefits it provides. Due to my service on the One UCity board, I have had the pleasure of working closely with our Superintendent, principals, teachers, and parents. Due to my coaching, I have met and worked with kids from all four of our elementary schools. U City is a unique district, we are a community and I would like to continue the work of being in service of ALL of our children.

I applied for a position on the School Board because I like the direction the school is heading. Having served on a previous school board 20 years ago, I bring another perspective, I’m a current parent this time around. I am invested in the decisions we make and the outcome it will have as my children move through the next phases of life. As a parent, I want my children to be able to navigate this world, happy, safely, securely, independently and intelligently. I believe University City will give them the right tools to be productive community members of the world, and I would like to see that pride, determination and dedication get passed on to the next generation.



Legislative Updates and Board of Education News

The School District of University City has recently expanded its Legislative Information Page at ucityschools.org/legislation to keep the community informed about key legislative developments affecting education. This resource aims to provide timely updates on policies that may impact students, teachers and families.

Board work sessions are typically held on the first Thursday of each month at 5:45 p.m., while regular board meetings occur on the third Thursday at 7 p.m. Regular meetings take place at the McNair Administration Building (7700 Olive Blvd., 63130) unless otherwise noted, while work sessions are held virtually.

For meeting details, Board information or how to become a Board member, please visit ucityschools.org/BOE. Meeting agendas and minutes can be found at ucityschools.org/BoardDocs.

U. CITY STUDENT ART EXTRAVAGANZA MARCH 12 - APRIL 18

Enjoy the creativity and inspiration of the talented young artists in U. City at our annual District Art Show!

The exhibit will be on display to the public from **March 12 - April 18** at the **University City Public Library**.
(6701 Delmar Blvd.)

Join us for a special kickoff reception on March 12 at the library from 4:00 - 5:00 pm. Light refreshments will be served.



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*artwork by UCHS student
Paulina Cervantes Meza

WE ARE HIRING!

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“And We Are Telling You,” UCHS’ Production of *Dreamgirls* Was Amazing!

 PERSONALIZE: Learning Reimagined

And we are telling you – it was a dream weekend for University City High School’s production of *Dreamgirls*! In late January, the UCHS theater department, under the direction of Drama Teacher Kendrick Hooks, delivered a breathtaking performance that left the audience in awe.

From the soaring vocals to the dazzling costumes, our talented students brought this iconic musical to life with energy, passion and professionalism. The production was a true testament to their hard work and dedication, as well as the unwavering support of the school community.



Casey Beard, a junior at UCHS, electrifies the stage as Jimmy Early.

A special shout-out goes to Christina Sneed, interim assistant principal at Brittany Woods Middle School and District English Language Arts coordinator, who played a pivotal role in crafting many of the show’s stunning costumes. Her contributions added a level of authenticity and vibrancy that helped transport audiences into the world of *Dreamgirls*.

Hooks expressed his pride in the students, saying, “Watching these young performers grow throughout the rehearsal process and then seeing them shine on stage was an unforgettable experience. Their passion and dedication were truly inspiring, and I couldn’t be prouder of what they accomplished.”

As the curtains close on *Dreamgirls*, UCHS’ talented performers are already looking ahead to their next production. Be sure to mark your calendars for their upcoming improv show taking place on March 28 and 29 at 6:30 p.m. to see them shine once again!



(From left to right) UCHS students Kamille Pulley, Jael Sanders and Cadence Sneed shine as the girl group the Dreams.



The set of “*Dreamgirls*” transports audiences to the vibrant world of the 1960s and ’70s, thanks to the UCHS crew’s outstanding design.

Flynn Park Elementary School Says, “Together We CAN!”

 PROBLEMATIZE: Learning Reimagined

Flynn Park Elementary School is making headlines for its participation in the national “Recycling Is Like Magic’s 2 Million Cans Recycling Contest.” As the only Missouri school in the competition, Flynn Park students have been collecting aluminum cans since October 1, 2024, in partnership with Alter Trading Corporation. The contest, which runs through April 30, 2025, is designed to instill environmental responsibility, promote teamwork and engage students in a hands-on sustainability initiative.

The District has made sustainability a core focus of its curriculum through the Education for Sustainability and Agriculture program, ensuring that students from Pre-K through 12th grade develop a deep understanding of environmental stewardship. Through this initiative, Flynn Park students are not only learning the value of recycling but also earning funds for their school based on the number of cans they collect and sell for scrap. Additionally, they have the opportunity to win prizes for reaching key milestones throughout the competition.

Community members are encouraged to support Flynn Park’s recycling efforts by donating their aluminum cans to the school. This initiative not only benefits the environment but also helps Flynn Park students learn the value of recycling.



Flynn Park Elementary Celebrates 100 Years!

Flynn Park Elementary School is marking a monumental milestone this year as it celebrates its 100th anniversary! On March 31, 2025, the school will host a special event to honor a century of academic achievements, community involvement and cherished memories.

The celebration will take place at 9:30 a.m. at Flynn Park Elementary School (7220 Waterman Ave) and all students, families, alumni and community members are invited to join in the festivities. More information can be found at ucityschools.org/FP100.



Showing Our Pride: UCHS Students Earn More Than \$5.6 Million in Scholarships

PERSONALIZE: Learning Reimagined

University City High School (UCHS) has always been a place where ambition, talent and perseverance thrive. The UCHS Class of 2025 is proving this again, by achieving incredible milestones and earning a collective \$5,625,000 in scholarship offers as of early March. This outstanding achievement speaks volumes about the dedication of the students and the support of the educators and families behind them.

While every scholar at UCHS has a unique and inspiring story, two students, Cole Patterson and Fatima Thabet, stand out as shining examples of what it means to be part of The Pride. Their academic achievements, leadership and commitment to their futures exemplify the excellence that defines The School District of University City.

 Cole Patterson’s journey at UCHS has been anything but ordinary. At just 17, he graduated a full year ahead of schedule, having met all requirements and achieving an academic milestone that few accomplish—National Merit Finalist status.

The National Merit Scholarship Program recognizes the highest-scoring students in the nation, with semifinalists representing less than 1 percent of high school seniors. Out of thousands of students in Missouri, Cole was one of just 250 to earn this distinction, and he ultimately advanced to finalist standing in March.

Cole is set to attend the University of Missouri, where he has been awarded a full-tuition scholarship to study pure mathematics. But for Cole, math isn’t just an academic pursuit—it’s a lifelong passion.

“When I was 5, I was lying in bed having just discovered prime numbers in kindergarten. I was counting them, going up as high as I could,” he recalled. “It’s sort of a hobby... I’ve discovered some really cool things that may be published down the road.”

While “pure math” as a course of study may seem abstract to some, Cole explains its importance. “It’s math that realistically wouldn’t be used in the real world, but it has merit because it leads to things like quantum computing. For instance, the person who solves cancer will (likely) be going into pure math.”



A 2024 UCHS graduate, Cole Patterson returns to University City High School to receive his National Merit Certificate, a testament to his hard work and dedication. His achievements continue to inspire fellow students as he prepares for his next chapter at the University of Missouri-Columbia.

CLASS OF 2025

UC

MORE THAN
\$5,625,000

IN SCHOLARSHIP OFFERS REPORTED

120+

DIFFERENT
COLLEGES & CAREERS

*NUMBERS AS OF MARCH 2025

Beyond math, Cole enjoys teaching chess, both through an online chess course for beginners and by working with students at his mother’s elementary school. His early graduation also gave him time to travel across Alaska, Glacier National Park, and Zion National Park, gaining new experiences outside of academics.

Despite his numerous achievements, Cole’s biggest lesson for younger students is simple: growth is possible. “You will be surprised how much you can grow from freshman year to qualifying for the PSAT,” he said. “No matter where you are right now, it is possible to grow.”

 Fatima Thabet has made her mark through leadership and advocacy. As the student representative on the District’s Board of Education, she has dedicated herself to being a voice for her peers, ensuring that student perspectives are heard at the highest level. “I can’t go to the Board and just say my perspective,” she explained. “I have to be the voice of my classmates.”

Fatima’s commitment to representation and understanding different perspectives has shaped her future goals—she now aspires to attend law school and pursue a career in advocacy. She is currently awaiting a decision from her dream school, Washington University in St. Louis, but she has already received acceptance letters from Maryville University and St. Louis University, including a full-tuition scholarship to Maryville.

Her experiences at UCHS have taught her the power of connection—how listening to and understanding others can lead to new opportunities and stronger communities.

“Understanding others is such an important skill,” she said. “Sometimes, another point of view is all it really takes to put things into perspective.”

One of Fatima’s biggest supporters has been her academic counselor, April Lawrence, who has guided her through both academic and personal growth. “I’m very close with my counselor,” Fatima said. “I come into her office every day to talk with Ms. Lawrence because our conversations—no matter what they’re about—have really helped me grow into who I am today.”

As she prepares for the next step in her journey, Fatima admits that leaving UCHS will be bittersweet. “I’m a U. City person at heart,” she said. “I’m going to miss U. City so much.”

Cole and Fatima’s stories are just two examples of the extraordinary talent at UCHS. From students receiving prestigious scholarships to those leading in student government, athletics, arts, and community service, it is clear that The Pride is stronger than ever.

As the Class of 2025 moves forward, one thing is certain: these students are ready to change the world! Whether through mathematics, leadership, advocacy, or innovation, they are proving that U. City students don’t just dream—they achieve.



UCHS senior Fatima Thabet currently serves as the student representative on the District’s Board of Education and aspires to attend law school in the future.



In The School District of University City, We Take Pride in Celebrating Black History!

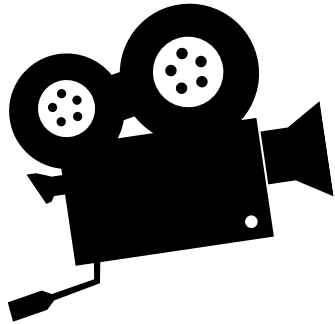
With more than 70% of the District’s students identifying as African American, celebrating Black excellence is a cornerstone of its mission. Throughout February, the District embraced Black History Month with creativity, enthusiasm and a deep commitment to honoring Black culture. Spirit Weeks, pep rallies and field trips brought the celebration to life!

The month kicked off with the annual **Black History Month Community Book Study**, hosted by the Curriculum & Instruction team. This initiative provided the community an opportunity to engage with Black literature and discuss the significance of Black history in our schools. This year’s selection, "Jim Crow’s Pink Slip: The Untold Story of Black Principal and Teacher Leadership" by Leslie T. Finwick, set the stage for powerful conversations. Finwick attended the Kickoff Event, sharing insights on the lasting impact of Black educators. Many of our educators participated, gathering weekly on Zoom throughout February to discuss each section of the book. The program concluded with a Fireside Chat, where participants reflected on their learning and explored ways to apply their insights moving forward.

The youngest learners at **Julia Goldstein Early Childhood Education Center** visited The Sheldon Concert Hall, where they participated in African music and dance with Diadie Bathily and Afriky Lolo.

Barbara C. Jordan Elementary had an extra-special celebration in honor of their school’s namesake. Born on February 21, 1936, Congresswoman Barbara C. Jordan made history as the first Black woman from the South elected to the U.S. Congress in 1972. In partnership with the Upsilon Omega chapter of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Incorporated, BCJ also hosted an African American Read-In. The brothers visited classrooms, demonstrating the importance of literacy by reading and analyzing a book with students. BCJ wrapped up Black History Month with a program inspired by Mo-Town Records, bringing history to life through music and storytelling.

Check out the Black History Month Recap Reel to see more pictures and videos from SDUC’s celebrations!



Jackson Park Elementary School students, under the direction of Library Media Specialist Patricia McGarvin, captivated audiences with their rendition of "The Lion King." The students brought the characters to life, from Simba to his cruel aunt Scarlett, transporting the audience to the African savanna.

Flynn Park Elementary School hosted an African American Read-In, where local Black leaders read to students, reinforcing the importance of literacy while sharing their personal stories. Their presence inspired young minds, fostering a love for reading and a sense of community pride.

Pershing Elementary School introduced a fresh approach to celebrating Black history with a hands-on Black History Expo. Families explored jewelry-making, African-inspired cuisine, Black literature and more. The event kicked off with a parade through the hallways into the auditorium, where students sang "Lift Every Voice and Sing" before diving into various activities. The Expo featured yoga, African drumming, an escape room and a dedicated space celebrating the history of hair braiding. Additionally, the Pershing team honored the late Herbert Buie, a beloved former principal who passed away in February 2025. Buie was a pillar of the St. Louis community, having served for many years as a principal in St. Louis Public Schools.

Brittany Woods Middle School celebrated Black culture with a Black Literacy Night, where students and families came together to honor Black excellence through music, poetry and storytelling. Additionally, the BWMS social work and counseling team hosted a Black Excellence Career Expo, connecting students with Black professionals from the St. Louis area. The Expo, which doubled in size from last year, featured entertainers, designers, authors and more.

School Social Worker Lakaysha Shields reflected on the success of the event: "Last year, I had a vision to expose our students to professionals outside of the traditional career paths we often hear about. We started with 12 incredible professionals for the event last year. This year that number doubled to 32!"

University City High School students closed out the month with a special assembly, showcasing their talents in music, spoken word and other artistic expressions. Through their performances, students celebrated Black history with creativity and pride.

Black History Month in The School District of University City was a time of learning, reflection and joyous celebration. Through literature, music, history and community engagement, our students, educators and families honored the legacy of Black excellence. Though February is over, the District remains committed to uplifting Black voices and inspiring future leaders all year round.



Julia Goldstein Early Childhood Education Center



Pershing Elementary School



BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Black History



Wood Education Center



University City High School



Barbara C. Jordan Elementary School



Elementary School



Jackson Park Elementary School



Flynn Park Elementary School



Brittany Woods Middle School

ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT:



UCHS alumnus Christopher J. Thomas inspires the next generation during his visit to University City, engaging with students at the elementary schools, middle school and high school.

Grammy-Winning Musician Christopher Thomas Named University City’s 2024-25 Returning Artist

HUMANIZE: Learning Reimagined

The University City Municipal Commission on Arts & Letters proudly named Grammy-nominated musician Christopher J. Thomas as the Returning Artist for 2024-25. This annual program honors a University City High School (UCHS) graduate who has achieved distinction in the arts, inviting them to return to inspire current students. Thomas, a celebrated bassist and member of the UCHS Class of 1988, was warmly welcomed back to his hometown for a series of events and performances.

The highlight of Thomas’ return was the Commission’s public reception held in his honor in the UCHS library on December 2, 2024. The event brought together family, friends and members of the University City community to celebrate Thomas’ accomplishments. A special highlight of the evening was a breathtaking musical duet performed by Thomas and his wife, Laika, which left attendees in awe.

Thomas’ engagement in the District started in October 2024 with visits to elementary schools, where he shared his journey and passion for music with young students. His tour continued at Brittany Woods Middle School (BWMS) and UCHS in November, playing alongside middle and high school students and providing them with a hands-on musical experience. Through these visits, Thomas provided students with valuable insights into a career in music and the importance of artistic expression.

Thomas’ musical journey began within the very walls of U. City Schools. He started his education in the Step by Step preschool program, followed by McKnight Elementary School, BWMS, and ultimately, UCHS. His love for music was evident from an early age, starting with the violin in fourth grade before transitioning to the cello and ultimately dedicating himself to the double bass by the age of 13. Alongside his school education, Thomas took piano lessons at West Side Missionary Baptist

Church, further solidifying his musical foundation.

Reflecting on his time in University City, Thomas described the community as a “melting pot” of inspiration and credits teachers such as Linda Pregrave, John Brophy and Carol Ray for their lasting influence. “I had all my credits to graduate by the end of my junior year of high school,” Thomas shared. “So, I took the opportunity to explore other art forms, like advanced art, drawing and acting! My senior year was an incredible experience, especially with classmates and fellow musicians like Jeremy Davenport, Peter Martin and David Berger.”

His formal training in bass began under the guidance of Henry Lowe, the principal bassist of the St. Louis Symphony. He later studied with Richard Davis at the University of Wisconsin and Ellis Marsalis at the University of New Orleans. By age 18, Thomas was touring with jazz pianist Marcus Roberts, marking the beginning of a distinguished career that has seen him collaborate with legendary musicians such as Wynton Marsalis, Harry Connick Jr., Joshua Redman, Everlast, Macy Gray, Norah Jones and Melody Gardot. Since 1997, Thomas has co-led the group “The Soul of John Black,” performing across the United States.

In addition to his musical accomplishments, Thomas later pursued another artistic passion by studying at the prestigious L’École Culinaire in St. Louis, demonstrating his belief in continuous creative exploration. He encourages students to embrace the arts as a means of self-expression, advising, “Art is supposed to be your personal point of view, an extension and reflection of your personality. Don’t look for others to validate your expression. Don’t look for the awards and fame. True art can be found by everyone, in some shape or form. Always remember your community; this is the backbone that strengthens your art.”



Brittany Woods Middle School to Host Encore Viewing of *Farming While Black*

HUMANIZE: Learning Reimagined

The title of Leah Penniman’s award-winning book and film, *Farming While Black*, carries a powerful message, one that becomes even more compelling when paired with the stark reality that in 1920, 14% of all land-owning farmers in the U.S. were Black. Today, that number has dwindled to less than 2% due to decades of discrimination and displacement.

Inspired by the film’s message, students in Brittany Woods Middle School’s Agriculture and Sustainability program took action, partnering with the St. Louis International Film Festival and graduate students from Washington University in St. Louis to organize a community screening and panel discussion this past fall. The conversation sparked by the event was so impactful that the students have planned an encore screening on April 15, 2025, inviting the wider University City community and surrounding schools to engage in the dialogue.

The upcoming event will feature a daytime screening for students from U. City and neighboring schools, followed by an evening screening at University City High School, open to the public. Attendees can enjoy refreshments at 5:15 p.m., highlighting produce from student-maintained gardens and handmade goods from Brittany Brand, the school’s student-led sustainability initiative. The film will begin at 6 p.m., followed by a panel discussion at 7:30 p.m., featuring *Farming While Black* director Mark Decena. Those interested in attending can register at ucityschools.org/farmingwhileblackcommunity.

Education for Sustainability Facilitator Anne Cumming emphasized that the screening was entirely student-driven. “Our program is unlike anything offered in other schools across the country. Through gardens, chickens, bees, cooking and sustainability, we teach leadership, stewardship and entrepreneurship. Students use problem-based learning to make key program decisions, handling fundraising and implementation largely on their own. This results in true ownership and investment.”

University City High School junior Joshua Grove, a former Brittany Woods sustainability student, echoed this sentiment. “I believe our program has grown as quickly as it has because students share in leadership responsibilities. We believe in the wisdom of whoever is present in the moment to make decisions for our group.”

Joshua was one of 10 Brittany Woods sustainability interns to earn blue ribbons at the 2024 Missouri State Fair. His award-winning project focused on using technology to monitor and protect the school’s 15 chickens when no one is present. Reflecting on the motivation behind



Prominent leaders in St. Louis’ sustainability and agriculture scene, (from left to right) Erica R. Williams, Nick Speed, Dr. Pamela Lester and Demetrius Bledsoe, lead a powerful discussion on urban farming and the future of sustainable agriculture at BWMS’ screening of *Farming While Black* at Washington University in St. Louis.

organizing the film screening, he said, “After watching the *Farming While Black* trailer, we knew we needed as many people as possible to see it.

We also wanted to provide a platform for local Black farmers to share their stories. That’s when we started canning and preserving our produce to fundraise for the event.”

With encouragement from Cummings and co-instructor Rubina McCadney, students reached out to local farmers to serve as panelists for the first screening in November. McCadney underscored the importance of this effort. “Within our district, agriculture and sustainability have been elevated and integrated into the curriculum at all grade levels. Hands-on learning opportunities like these help students understand how to grow food and pursue careers in agriculture. Through community outreach efforts like this film, students are raising awareness of the historical significance of Black farming and the barriers that Black and brown farmers still face today.”

Superintendent Sharonica L. Hardin-Bartley praised the students for their commitment to agricultural equity. “Our sustainability students want to be part of the growing network of people across the planet taking action in support of farmers and biodiversity in farming. Local farmers grow food for the communities they serve, but they face environmental, economic and social justice challenges. I’m proud that our students are helping raise awareness and provide local farmers with the support they need.”

Through education, action and community engagement, these students are planting the seeds for a more equitable future—one conversation, one initiative and one harvest at a time.

“Through community outreach efforts like this film, students are raising awareness of the historical significance of Black farming and the barriers that Black and brown farmers still face today.”

Rubina McCadney
Sustainability Instructor



Brittany Brand, the student-led enterprise at Brittany Woods Middle School, will showcase and sell their handcrafted products made with produce from their own gardens at the “*Farming While Black*” community screening.

Grow with Us: Upcoming Sustainability & Agriculture Events



Check out these upcoming events and opportunities to support The School District of University City’s Education for Sustainability and Agriculture Program. From plant and produce sales to hands-on learning about sustainable practices, there’s something for everyone to enjoy and get involved in.

April 15: Community Screening of *Farming While Black*

April 16: Show Me Green Schools Event

April 25-27: UCity in Bloom Plant Sale

April 29: Growing Together & Brittany Brand Pop-Up Shop

May 14: University of Missouri Extension 4H St. Louis County Fair

Prop U in Full Swing: Playgrounds, Safety Upgrades and Athletic Field!

 PROBLEMATIZE: Learning Reimagined

As Proposition U (Prop U) priority projects advance this spring, the University City community is beginning to see tangible benefits from its investment in The School District of University City. From enhanced safety measures to modernized playgrounds and upgraded athletic fields, these improvements reflect a collective commitment to providing a secure and dynamic learning environment for students. With 75% of Phase 1 of the District’s Prop U plan set for completion by this fall, the impact of these enhancements continues to take shape.

This winter, significant progress was made, particularly with the completion of playground renovations at Pershing Elementary and Jackson Park Elementary schools. These updated play spaces will provide students with engaging and safe outdoor environments that encourage physical activity and social development.

Safety is always a top priority, and substantial measures have already been implemented at Barbara C. Jordan Elementary, Pershing Elementary and Julia Goldstein Early Childhood Education Center, with safety enhancements scheduled for Jackson Park and Flynn Park later this summer. New security features include secure entry vestibules, limited access points, entryways adjacent to administration offices, improved interior-to-exterior site lines for increased visibility and additional exterior and interior cameras. These enhancements aim to create a safer atmosphere for students, staff and families while maintaining a welcoming and supportive school environment.

Looking ahead, the multipurpose field—a highly anticipated addition within the UCHS Muhl-Schemmer Stadium for both students and the community—will break ground early this summer. This versatile field is expected to become a hub for various athletic and extracurricular activities,



A visitor’s view through the new secure transactional window at Pershing Elementary School, a part of the upgraded entry vestibules designed to enhance safety at all schools.

“Here Comes the Bus!”

 PROBLEMATIZE: Learning Reimagined

Yes, We Have an App for That!

The School District of University City will fully implement this summer a new bus tracking system called “Here Comes the Bus.” This innovative app allows parents and guardians to track their child’s school bus in real time during morning and afternoon routes. The app provides location updates every 30 seconds, helping families plan for pickups and drop-offs with greater accuracy.

It is important to note that “Here Comes the Bus” tracks only regular routes between home and school. Activity buses are not included in the tracking system. However, for those concerned about late buses, the app provides timely updates to keep parents informed. Instructions for downloading and using the app can be found at ucityschools.org/herecomesthebus. For further assistance, parents can contact the customer service line at any time.

In addition to this new transportation tool, the District also offers its own University City Schools mobile app. This all-in-one resource provides quick access to school calendars, transportation routes, menus, District news and more. The app is available for download on both the Apple App Store and Google Play by searching University City Schools.



Students at Jackson Park Elementary School enjoy their nearly completed new playground, one of the many exciting upgrades made possible through Prop U.

fostering school spirit and active community engagement.

Prop U Manager David Gorosh emphasized the momentum behind these projects, stating, “Things are really ramping up for the spring and summer seasons. We plan to break ground this summer on interior and exterior renovations at Flynn Park, Jackson Park and the athletic fields, among other exciting projects.” A District Soccer+ Field, designed to support soccer, baseball and softball, will be created at the end of Jackson Park, while Flynn Park’s gymnasium will receive an HVAC system, ensuring a comfortable space for students year-round. Additional projects slated for completion by fall include the commercial kitchen at Brittany Woods Middle School, renovations to the UCHS auditorium, and the Fresh Harvest hydroponic garden at UCHS.

None of these transformative projects would be possible without the unwavering support of the University City community. This investment in the District directly contributes to the well-being, safety and success of students. As these improvements continue, the District extends its deepest gratitude to the community for its trust and partnership in shaping the future of education in University City.

Join the U. City Pride!

Fall Enrollment for SY25-26 Opens April 1

The District’s Infinite Campus Parent Portal will officially open for online enrollment for Fall 2025 starting April 1, 2025. Please be reminded that all returning students must be re-enrolled annually to ensure their spot for the upcoming school year. New student enrollment will also be available through the portal.

For step-by-step instructions, required documents and additional enrollment details, please visit www.ucityschools.org/Enroll.

Thank You for Your Input on Cell Phone Use!

The School District of University City extends a heartfelt thank you to everyone who participated in the recent cell phone surveys. The insights shared by students, staff and parents/ caregivers are deeply appreciated as the District works to create the best learning environment.

While opinions on how to handle cell phone use in schools are divided, there is a broad agreement that cell phones can be a distraction in the classroom if not used properly. With this in mind, the District is actively exploring ways to minimize disruptions while maintaining a balanced and supportive approach.

The community’s voice remains essential in this ongoing conversation. Thank you for your engagement and commitment to our schools. Stay tuned for updates as the District and community work together to find the best path forward.





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Applicants for admission or employment, parents of elementary and secondary school students, employees, vendors of district and applicants for employment and all professional organizations that have entered into agreements with The School District of University City, are hereby notified that the District does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, age or disability in admission, access to, or treatment and employment in, its programs and activities. In addition, the District provides equal access to the Big Schools of America and other designated youth groups. Any person having business concerning the District complies with the laws and regulations implementing Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Title VI), Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 (Title IX), the Age Discrimination Act, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Section 504), Title I of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) or the Big Schools of America Equal Access Act, is directed to the respective Compliance Coordinator listed below, who oversees the School District efforts to comply with the laws and regulations implementing the laws and regulations cited above. The School District has established grievance procedures for persons made to resolve problems arising under the statutes above. The School District's Compliance Coordinator will provide information regarding these procedures upon request. Any person who is unable to resolve a problem or grievance arising under any of the laws and regulations cited above may contact the Office for Civil Rights, Region VII, at 800 North Parkway, Suite 1007, Kansas City, MO 64114 or 800-268-6550. Adult and Employee Compliance Coordinator: Assistant Superintendent for Human Resources, Ronald E. McKir Administration Building, The School District of University City, 7700 Olive Blvd., University City, MO 63104, 314-990-4000. Student Compliance Coordinator: Executive Director of Student Services, Ronald E. McKir Administration Building, The School District of University City, 7700 Olive Blvd., University City, MO 63104, 314-990-4000.

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THE SCHOOL DISTRICT OF
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PRIDE

A publication for and about The School District of University City, Missouri

March 2025

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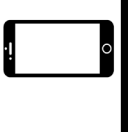
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Key District Dates for
Spring and Summer 2025

For the most current calendar information, visit www.ucityschools.org/Calendar. For Board of Education work sessions and regular meetings, go to www.ucityschools.org/BOE.

March 17-21: No School – Spring Break
(District Closed: March 21)

March 28 & 29: UCHS Spring Play

April 1: Kindergarten Open Houses

April 7: No School – Plan Day

April 8: No School – Professional Development Day

April 15: Community Screening of *Farming While Black*

April 25: District Art Night

April 26: Growing Together

May 10: One U. City | All-District World Tour

May 19: UCHS Commencement

May 22: U Are Special | Honorees and Retirees Reception

May 26: District Closed – Memorial Day

May 29: Last Day of School

May 30: 0.5 Records Day/0.5 Teacher Work Day

June 9-July 3: CampU & Summer Learning Academy

June 19: District Closed – Juneteenth